

CHANGES IN JOB CONTENT

Technological developments are altering job content and skill requirements for many occupations in the modern mill. One or more of the operative's traditional manual duties (e.g., creeling [loading] and doffing [unloading], repairing breaks, cleaning, and materials handling) are being entirely eliminated or significantly reduced as a result of transferral to a machine. Consequently, while the operative's manual skills are still required, the relative time allotted to these skills is being greatly reduced. It is expected, for example, that technological changes will reduce the spinner's traditional manual duties from an average of about three-quarters of his total time in the 1960's to about half in the 1970's, and will increase the time spent in patrolling the machines from about 25 to 50 percent. In the most advanced mills, where several textile processes are very highly mechanized or automatic, patrolling longer lines of machines and watching for problems is the operative's major job requirement.

It is difficult to generalize about the effect on the worker of increased mechanization. Physically arduous jobs are being mechanized and temperature and humidity conditions are greatly improved in modernized mills. The increase in patrolling reduces time spent on repetitive manipulative jobs, but it may be more tiring generally. On faster, more automatic machinery, downtime is more costly and the worker has a greater responsibility to monitor the machines closely. This may result in pressure on the worker and greater anxiety. Some automatic devices, on the other hand, may lessen certain time stresses, but may require the worker to be more alert to malfunctions.

ADJUSTMENTS TO CHANGE

Working conditions in the industry remain largely a matter of management discretion. Only about a fourth of all textile workers are in mills covered by collective bargaining, compared with over 60 percent in all manufacturing industries.

Contraction of the Northern textile industry, where union organization is strongest, seriously depleted union ranks. Attempts to organize Southern mills have been relatively unsuccessful. Nearly seven-eighths of New England cotton workers and only one-eighth of those in the Southwest were employed in mills having collective bargaining agreements in 1965. In synthetic textile mills, three-fifths of the workers were covered in New England, two-fifths in the Middle Atlantic States and 1 percent in the Southeast.

Earnings are low in textiles relative to other industries, in spite of sizable increases in the post-war period. From 1947 to 1966, average weekly earnings in textile mills rose 3.7 percent annually compared with 4.4 percent in manufacturing. In 1966, average hourly and weekly earnings totaled \$1.96 and \$82.12, respectively, compared with averages of \$2.71 and \$112.19 in manufacturing. Supplements to wages and salaries (including such items as employer contributions to social insurance, private pension, and welfare funds) as a percent of total compensation are also low in the textile industry relative to those in manufacturing.

Formal provisions for worker adjustment to technological change are found primarily in plants with union agreements and even these are few in number. Contracts usually provide for the principle of seniority as a measure of protection for the employee displaced by technological developments, or other reasons, but limitations may be included. Some contracts contain provisions which require advance notice to the union, union consultation, or a trial period for a proposed technological change.

Machine changes which affect the pace of work—"speedup" (i.e., installing faster machines or speeding up old ones) and "stretchout" (i.e., increasing the number of machines assigned to the worker)—are a major topic of labor-management discussion. In some contracts, workload assignments are subject to review by the union and may be submitted to arbitration.

Contract provisions designed to financially assist the worker who is laid off as a result of a technological change are very limited. Provisions for severance pay were included in 11 of the 28 contracts studied by BLS,¹⁰ but only a few specified technological displacement as a condition for payment. Several contracts required retirement as the only condition for severance pay. Moreover, supplemental unemployment benefits (SUB) intended to supplement unemployment compensation during temporary layoffs are nonexistent in the industry.

¹⁰ *Major Collective Bargaining Agreements, Severance Pay and Layoff Benefit Plans* (BLS Bulletin 1425-2, 1965). These data are from 1963 collective bargaining agreements.